The construction of opposition relations in high-, middle-, and low-rated postgraduate ESL Chinese students' essays

The construction of opposition relations is highly expected in writing at higher-university levels. Through specific discourse markers, writers signal these relations to demonstrate precision and awareness of complexity of others' views and to evaluate those views critically. However, despite the high value of opposition relations in advanced academic writing, little is known about students' construction of these relations. To contribute to this knowledge, this study built a corpus of argumentative essays written by native speakers of Chinese as part of their master's course assignments and compared the form and function of opposition relations in low-, middle-, and high-scored student writing. The quantitative analysis showed that the relationship between the frequency of opposition markers and writing score was not significant. However, considerable differences were found between the function and writing score when analysing the results qualitatively. High-scoring students used substantially more concessive and contrast expressions than middle- and low-scoring students. Suggestions for the teaching of opposition relations are discussed.

Keywords: writing, opposition relations; disciplinary expectations; Chinese postgraduate students

1. Introduction

In the context of an academic community, especially at a higher university level, three key expectations for student writing have been distinguished. Students are expected to express their position toward a topic explicitly, to convey that position to their readers coherently and to indicate how their position recognises the existence of other positions (Aull & Lancaster, 2014; Basturkmen & von Randow, 2014; Hyland, 2012; Nesi & Gardner, 2012; Wu, 2007). Similar expectations exist in the master's programme of TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) in one of the UK universities, where the current study was conducted. In addition to demonstrating their knowledge of the subject, students are required to construct their arguments clearly, to state counterarguments that might be raised by their readers, and to find appropriate ways of refuting those counterarguments (from the students' handbook on assignment and dissertation writing in the Department). In brief, it is a contrastive and evaluative approach that is highly valued in this academic context. Hence, to write successfully in the programme, students need to adopt this approach in their writing. As Hyland (2004) posits, texts become effective when they follow 'rhetorical practices, accepted by community members' (p. 8).

One of the important means to write in line with these expectations is through the construction of opposition relations, such as *contrast*, *concessive*, and *corrective*, using appropriate discourse markers (Halliday & Hassan, 1976; Martin & White, 2005; Izutsu, 2008). For example, to signal a contrast, students can employ such markers as *but*, *however*, *by contrast*, *on the other hand*, *whereas*, and *while*. To express a concession, they could use such markers as *although*, *despite of*, *however*, *nevertheless*, *notwithstanding that*, and *yet*. For correction purposes, typical discourse markers are *instead*, *rather* and *not ...but*. By manipulating these linguistic devices strategically, students can, then, juxtapose and adjudicate between different views and construct an academic stance that projects precision and awareness of complexity of other's views.

However, despite the value of opposition relations in advanced academic writing, little is known about how these relations are constructed by students. Yet, this understanding is important, especially when there are blurred conceptualisations of opposition relations in the linguistics and teaching literature (Hyland, 2005; Izutsu, 2008) and which could, therefore, cause learning problems, especially for students who come from a different writing tradition (Aull & Lancaster, 2014; Hyland & Milton, 1999; Lancaster, 2011; Li & Wharton, 2012; Xie, 2016). Thus, in order to shed more light on students' construction of opposition relations, this study focused on writing of native speakers of Chinese who constitute the largest proportion of postgraduate student population in British universities (HESA, 2015/16), including the university where this study took place. Forty-four argumentative essays as part of students' TESOL course assignments were first analysed in order to determine the relationship

between the use of opposition markers and students' writing score. Additionally, to identify specific functions that opposition expressions performed in high-, middle- and low-scored student writing, twenty-four essays were also analysed qualitatively.

In this paper, we will first consider the complex nature of opposition relations and how it could lead to problems in learning these relations. Some evidence on how students construct opposition relations and the relationship between patterns of use and writing score will also be presented. We will then explain the corpus that we built for this study as well as the criteria that we applied to distinguish between different types of opposition relations. When presenting the findings, the key focus will be on specific devices that students used to signal opposition relations and their comparison in terms of the functions they performed in low-, middle-, and high-scored essays. Finally, some implications for the teaching of opposition relations will also be provided.

2. Literature review

2.1. Problematic nature of opposition relations

In order to conduct a rigorous investigation of opposition relations or to successfully teach and learn these relations, we need objective criteria to clearly define and distinguish between different types of opposition relations. In the linguistic literature, however, conceptualisations of opposition relations are rather inconsistent and there is little consensus on their classification. Different linguists have termed opposition relations differently or used them interchangeably (Izutsu, 2008). For example, Traugott (1986, 1995), as quoted in Izutsu (2008, p. 647), uses the terms 'contrastive' and 'concessive' to express the same meaning, as in the following:

> Some inference of temporal overlap is allowed by our knowledge or (sic.) the world even in the contrastive ('concessive') meaning of Jane sang while Jill played (Traugott, 1986: 144).

In this example, the terms 'contrastive' and 'concessive' are used interchangeably, and it is, therefore, unclear whether their meanings are identical.

An understanding of opposition relations is further complicated due to the dichotomous views of these relations. As observed by Izutsu (2008, p. 647), opposition relations have often been classified into two major groups of categories: 'the contrast and concessive' and 'corrective and non-corrective'. The contrast and concessive dichotomy originated from Lakoff (1971) and other linguists (Blakemore, 1989; Kehler, 2002) who were mainly interested in clausal connections rather than connections between smaller constituents and, therefore, did not consider the corrective usage of *but* as in *John is not American but British*, for example (Izutsu, 2008, p. 647). The corrective and non-corrective dichotomy originated from the research on European languages, such as German, Spanish, Swedish, which was mainly interested in grouping coordinate conjunctions into corrective or

SN-type conjunctions and non-corrective or PA-type conjunctions (Abraham, 1979; Lang, 1984; von Klopp, 1994). The SN-type conjunctions (e.g., *sino* in Spanish or *sondern* in German) are classified as those which perform some kind of correction with the meaning of 'not . . . but . . . ,' and the non-corrective conjunctions (e.g., from *pero* in Spanish or *aber* in German) convey overlapping contrast and concessive meanings, with no clear distinction made between them. Thus, while the dichotomous classifications of opposition relations have served specific research purposes, they did not, however, encompass all possible categories of opposition relations. It was only recently that the dichotomous division was questioned and the triadic classification was proposed instead (Foolen, 1991; Izutsu, 2008).

Furthermore, grammar books and dictionaries also add to the misunderstanding of opposition relations. For example, the definition of the marker *although* in the Cambridge English online dictionary says that this marker is only used to contrast meanings, as in the following:

Grace is an excellent athlete, although she injured her leg recently.

Harry is a great friend, although we don't see each other often.

While the marker *although* functions similarly in these sentences, it is not clear at all why the function of contrast is referred to in the definition of this marker. Similar confusion could be observed in the following two sentences:

The new city hall is amazing but it's going to cost a lot.

He's quite short, whereas his sister is tall.

The dictionary explains these markers as expressing contrast only, but it is clear from these sentences that the markers *but* and *whereas* perform different functions. The marker *but* in the first example signals concession, that is, it denies the assumption evoked from the content in the first clause. In *The new city hall is amazing but it's going to cost a lot*, the assumption is that if the new city hall is amazing, it should be built. The marker *whereas* in the second example functions as contrast to oppose two different items. Thus, although the dictionary explains that both examples express a contrast, a more detailed analysis of the sentences reveals that they denote two different types of opposition relations, that is, concession and contrast.

A cursory examination of some typical teaching materials further suggests that opposition as a concept is rarely unpacked and often inadequately practised. The well-established *Academic Writing: A handbook for international students* (Bailey, 2011) for example, has a short two-page section on 'conjunctions of opposition'. Note the position of the conjunctions in the following examples:

The economy is strong, ***but / ye****t there are frequent strikes.*

Although / while *there are frequent strikes the economy is strong.*

In spite of /despite *the frequent strikes the economy is strong.*

There are frequent strikes. ***However/Nevertheless****, the economy is strong. (p. 190)*

This presentation is followed by a series of mechanical exercises which ask learners to connect two independent clauses using the markers above, or to complete sentences from a given initial clause. The concept of concession is not introduced here or in the book, and there is no focus on how the order of information is crucial to the writer's position and intention.

A review of selected IELTS textbooks that many international students study for their entry to the UK university provides a similar picture of patchy coverage of concession within opposition relations. The best seller *Focus on IELTS* (O'Connell, 2014) presents a list of linking expressions to be placed in a table, but the category of 'contrast' is used for a wide range of links including *although, however, despite/in spite* of. The concept of concession is briefly introduced in a later unit with six examples, but with only one question about differential usage. In McCarter's *Ready for IELTS* (2010), a similarly brief focus on opposition markers is provided in a short 'Language focus' (p. 188) which states

In IELTS speaking and writing you can make your argument more persuasively by conceding or agreeing with a point of view then adding your own.

The section directs attention to an example in a text studied in the unit, and provides a sentence transforming exercise with markers such as *although, while, but* and *nonetheless + may/ might.* Once again, learners are given little opportunity to see how positioning of information can change meaning. More importantly, they learn little about the way opposition relations are used in different genres (Liu, 2008).

Recent corpus research on language teaching materials has also confirmed that 'much of the language taught in commercial materials differs markedly from the language that is actually used in spoken and written discourse' (Harwood, 2010, p. 9). Textbooks seem to expose students to the language that is not always representative of how it is used in real life situations (Harwood, 2010; 2014). Conrad's (2004) finding of textbooks' inappropriate treatment of the marker *though* is just one of the many examples demonstrating the existing gap between commercial materials and actual language use.

Given the inconsistent explanations of opposition relations, lack of clarity about their commonalities and differences in the existing literature, as well as students' difficulties with the construction of opposition relations, as we shall see in the following section, we, therefore, argue that a research-based practice should guide the design of language materials and the teaching of opposition relations. In addition, we suggest Izutsu's (2008) conceptual framework as a starting point for English language teachers to teach opposition relations successfully. Teachers

could introduce students to three types of opposition relations: *contrast*, *concessive* and *corrective*, and then explain the differences between the three types of relations using Izutsu's (2008) four criteria: the mutual exclusiveness of different compared items, the number and kind of compared items, the involvement of an assumption/assumptions, and the validity of segments combined (a detailed explanation of the criteria is presented in Izutsu, 2008 and summarised in Appendix A). The criteria for the distinction are essential. As Izutsu (2008, p. 649) warns, 'The classification based on meaning tends to be subjective'; therefore, to allow objective classification of the categories, the criteria are imperative to 'explicitly disambiguate one of the three meanings from the others, irrespective of the context where a sentence occurs' (Izutsu, 2008, p. 649).

2.2. Students' construction of opposition relations in writing

There are only a handful of studies that have looked at students' construction of opposition relations in their writing; even when these relations were studied, the main focus was not on opposition relations. For example, Aull and Lancaster (2014) compiled a large corpus of over 4,000 argumentative essays written by incoming first-year undergraduate students, upper-level undergraduate students and published academics and compared their use of such linguistic features as approximative hedges and boosters, code glosses and concessive and contrast connectors. To analyse concessive and contrast connectors specifically, Izutsu's (2008) conceptual framework was applied. Thus, for contrast expressions, they showed that more advanced academic writers used these expressions more frequently than first-year students, and even more frequently than published writers (p.168). In terms of the use of concessive, both the beginning and advanced student writers used them just about twice as frequently (400.2 and 418.6 times per 100.000 words respectively) as the expert writers (290 times per 100.000 words) (p. 170). Four expressions such as *nevertheless*, *nonetheless, at the same time*, and *still* were more frequent in the writing of advanced students than beginning students. The developmental pattern of six other analysed concessives, such as *however*, *but*, *although*, *yet*, *though*, and *while* was less predictive. As Aull and Lancaster (2014) observed, '[w]hile use of *although* and *but* is fairly evenly distributed across the groups, the student writers use *however*, *though*, and *while* more frequently than the COCAA [expert] writers.' (p. 170). Other studies have also demonstrated that student writers tend to use discourse markers, including the marker *however*, more frequently than expert writers (Basturkemen & von Randow, 2014; Bolton, Nelson, & Hung, 2002; Gardezi & Nesi, 2009). A study by Hinkel (2003), on the other hand, yielded somewhat different results. By comparing the writing of first-year L1 students with academically advanced L2 students, Hinkel (2003) showed that concessive markers such as *although*, *even though*, *while*, and *whereas* were rarely used in the writing of both groups of students. Hinkel (2003) did not explain clearly how concessive markers were conceptualised in her study but she

underscored a sophisticated nature of concession and tried to provide some explanation for the scarce use of concession in both L1 and L2 students' writing. In English, as Hinkel (2003) explained, concession is syntactically and semantically advanced subordinate construction; therefore, it is difficult to master it not only for L2 students but also for L1 students (p. 1062). With regard to Chinese students' learning of concession in English specifically, Hinkel (2003) pointed out that there could be interference from their L1. In Chinese, concessive takes the form of coordinating conjunctions, and as such, concessive subordinate clauses do not exist in Chinese. For example, in the Chinese language, it is possible to have 'dual/double conjunctions' (Matthews & Yip, 1994, p. 293), but such conjunctions are not allowed in the English language, as demonstrated in the examples provided by Lau (1972, p. 357) on Cantonese:

(1) Sui yin kui hai Faat Gwok Yan, daan hai kui m yam jau. Although he is Frenchman, but he not drink wine. (*Although* he is French, *but* he doesn't drink wine.)

(2) Jau suen ngoh ho kung, ngoh doyiu duk daai hok. Even though I very poor, I also must study university. (*Even though* I am poor, I *also*/*too* must study (at) university).

Such conjunctions are possible in the above examples because in the Chinese language, as explained by Matthews and Yip (1994), 'parataxis (the juxtaposition of two clauses) is involved rather than hypotaxis (the linking of a dependent element in a sentence through subordination) or subordination' (pp. 65, 293). That is, both clauses in a concessive construction play equal roles in a sentence.

It appears, thus, that in comparison to expert writers, student writers tend to overuse or underuse contrast and concession expressions in their writing. However, while the comparison of student writing with expert writing is important to understand students' construction of discourse markers, the rationale for this comparison is not always clear, especially, in the light of recent research on specific ways that disciplinary knowledge is constructed and the role of audience's expectations in the process of that construction (Aull & Lancaster, 2014; Becher & Trowler, 2001; Hyland, 2004, 2005; Nesi & Gardner, 2012; Soliday, 2011; Wilder, 2012). As the academic literacy research has shown, depending on specific task expectations, different linguistics choices are made to meet those expectations. This is because making the linguistic choices appropriate for one's audience seems to greatly impact success of one's writing (Flower et al, 1990; Hyland, 2004; 2016; Wingate, 2012). For student writers, thus, it is their tutors' expectations that need to be considered; one of the ways to understand how students conform to these expectations is to compare assignments written by high- and low-scoring students.

2.3. *The relationship between opposition expressions and writing score*

Recently, there has been an increased research focus on the relationship between students' use of specific linguistic expressions and their writing score. McNamara, Crossley, & McCarthy (2010), for example, looked at a large corpus of high- and low-rated essays written by undergraduate students and compared them in terms of their use of cohesive devices. The relationship between the cohesion markers and essay ratings was found insignificant. Similar results were obtained in Basturkmen and von Randow's (2014) study, where they focused on advanced academic writing by doctoral L2 students in different disciplines and, using Izutsu's (2008) conceptualisation of opposition relations, compared the frequencies of concessive constructions between higher- and lower-graded writing. No significant differences between these writing samples were identified either, but there was one finding that emerged as meaningful. The higher graded writers employed a wider range of concessive markers and tended to construct concessive relations without explicitly marking them with linguistic markers, although such instances constituted only ten per cent of the cases. Interesting findings were also obtained in Alarcon and Morales's (2011) study. Using Halliday and Hasan's (1976) concept of grammatical cohesion, they analysed cohesive devices in argumentative essays written by undergraduate students. As in the previous studies, Alarcon and Morales (2011) did not find any significant relationship between students' use of cohesive devices and their writing score. However, their qualitative analysis revealed that the students used the concessive marker *but* very frequently. They, therefore, argued that if this marker was replaced by *yet* or *however*, students could have made their claims stronger and, at the same time, increased their writing quality. Concessive, however, as explained by Alarcon and Morales (2011), is a complex construction and requires 'a higher level of maturity in argumentation and critical thinking among students' (p. 124).

In summary, student writers seem to overuse or underuse concessive and contrast markers and some of these markers are used less frequently than other concessive or contrast markers. The use of *nevertheless*, *nonetheless, but, at the same time*, and *still* seem to be the most problematic expressions for student writers. Furthermore, while the quantitative analysis of student writing did not find significant differences in the use of opposition relations by high- and low-scored writers, there was some evidence of this relationship when analysing students' writing qualitatively. Thus, to better understand the extent to which the use of opposition relations relates to students' writing score, this study investigated this relationship both quantitatively and qualitatively.

3. Methodology

3.1. Study aims

This study aimed to investigate students' use of opposition expressions at a postgraduate level, where the construction of these relations is highly valued. Specifically, the following questions were posed:

1. Is there a relationship between the use of opposition expressions and student writing score?
2. In terms of the functions of opposition expressions in student writing, what are the frequency patterns across low-essay scorers, average-essay scorers, and high-essay scorers? What expressions are most underused or overused by these scorers?

3.2. Study context and corpus design

This study took place in a northern UK university and was approved by the departmental ethics committee. An email along with a consent form was sent to one hundred fifty-five TESOL students (the total number of the TESOL students enrolled in the year 2014/2015) asking them to consent to their assignments being analysed for the research purposes. The consent to access students' assignments was also obtained from the Head of the Department. In total, we received consents from fifty-one students. Seven of the students were native speakers of English, but since we were interested in only native speakers of Chinese, we excluded those seven students from the sample and focused on only forty-four students. To answer our research questions, two types of data were collected: a corpus of essays (between 4,000 and 5,000 words) written by the students over two terms and marks given by their tutors.

Extended essay assignments were the standard form of assessment for these students. Typically, they would be required to pass three such assignments in their taught programmes in order to progress and gain their degrees: an assignment from an option module in the autumn term and one from an option module in the spring term, as well as an assignment from one compulsory module in the spring term. We chose students' assignments from their option modules. The assignments were argumentative essays, which are characterised by exposition and discussion genres (Nesi & Gardner, 2012). To illustrate the type of the assignment, all the essay prompts tested the same reasoning and analytical skills, that is, they asked students to discuss the given statements of an assignment topic and to evaluate the extent to which they agreed with those statements. Although the style of assignment titles varied across modules, the prompts generally consisted of titles containing several parts and containing the key instruction 'discuss' or in several cases 'critically discuss'. Below are some example titles of the essays:

- Becoming bilingual changes the way we think. **Discuss** with focus on one of the following cognitive categories: time, space, motion, colour.
- How do the concepts of validity and washback help us to design 'good' tests? **Discuss** the various aspects of each concept and the relationships between them. …. You should provide concrete examples from specific tests to **illustrate your argument**.
- **Critically discuss** the concept of face as it exists within your own culture (or a culture you are confident discussing). With reference to Brown and Levinson's (1987) model of politeness, **discuss how**….
- The Speaking test is taken face-to-face, with two candidates and two examiners. This creates a more realistic and reliable measure of your ability to use English to communicate**. Discuss this claim** in respect to relevant concepts in testing theory….

The descriptors in the holistic marking criteria used for all master's assignments also indicate the expectations for these essay texts. Three of seven descriptors shown below for one mark band indicate the focus on the level of insight and knowledge, but also the need to show critical distance and to create an argument:

(i) Demonstrates command of the topic by showing a high level of perception and insight - a serious contribution to academic debate;

(iv) Clear, well-structured argument that is well crafted and cogent;

(v) Critical distance and outstanding analysis of the question

[Distinguished Band 70 – 79 in MA marking criteria]

A specific handbook on assignment and dissertation writing was available to these students. The extract below indicates the expectations surrounding the need for an argument in the essays; it explicitly foregrounds the use of discourse markers, most notably the concessive 'although' marker in the example given here:

> Join your ideas/sentences together to create an argument. Make certain you add 'logical' link words that explain your thinking and justify your argument. This means adding in expressions like "This argument is unsatisfactory because it omits three crucial facts", or "Although Smith insists repeatedly that his model is purely descriptive, there are two passages where he argues differently".

3.3. Data analysis

This study combined two research methods: the corpus-based approach and text-based analysis. The corpus approach was used to explore occurrence of opposition markers in the large data set quantitatively (that is, in assignments of 44 students). However, to analyse specific functions of opposition markers in student writing, we needed to investigate these markers manually. Since it would be labour intensive to analyse a large data volume

manually, we employed a text-based analysis using a small data set (that is, assignments of 24 students), as recommended by Matthiessen (2006).

First, we checked all the essays manually to exclude any footnotes, endnotes, appendices, charts, tables, captions, and figures (Bunton, 1999). We then converted the essays into Plain Text format and analysed them using AntConc, a freeware corpus analysis programme (Anthony, 2014). After running a word count, we first performed the search of all opposition markers to obtain their frequencies. Due to the length variation of the assignments and to make a comparison between the unequal size corpora, the number of the markers was computed per one hundred words. The frequencies of all the markers were computed using IBM SPSS Version 24. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were obtained to determine the relationship between the use of opposition expressions and writing score.

In order to identify specific functions that opposition expressions performed in student writing, 24 essays were then analysed qualitatively. We selected the essays from four high-scorers (with scores of 81, 77, 76, 76), four middle-scorers (with scores of 64.5, 64, 62.5, 62.5) and four low scorers (55.5, 55, 55, 55). The scores were sorted according to the assignment criteria provided in the MA Handbook in the Department. Module assignments are marked on a scale from 0 to 100, with the pass mark of 50. There are 3 levels of pass: a distinguished pass, with a score from 70 to100; a merit, with a score from 60 to 69; and a satisfactory, with a score from 50 to 59. For each selected student, we had one essay from Term 1 and one essay from Term 2. The analysis of the essays was carried out using Izutsu's (2008) adapted classification of opposition relations. Initially, we analysed the data in terms of three major categories: contrast, concessive and corrective, but after observing that some uses of the markers were only partially successful, we added these additional categories: contrast attempted, concessive attempted, corrective attempted. The addition of these categories also allowed us to capture a detailed picture of students' use of opposition relations and then to better understand the complex process of the learning of these relations. As the literature on second language acquisition suggests, students go through various stages in their learning before they could reach the level of an advanced language user (Ellis, 2004; Long, 1988). Therefore, to shed more light on these stages, the detailed analysis of the data was important. Furthermore, propositions that were inappropriate were coded as inappropriate. There were also a few propositions that did not fall into any of the three categories and we named them as elaborative due to their elaborative function. The definitions and examples of these categories are presented in Appendix A.

To ensure the reliability of the interpretation of the opposition markers, the two researchers checked them at two separate points in time. The total number of opposition markers within each category was then compared

between the researchers using Spearman's rho correlation coefficient. The correlation of .95 indicated that the interrater reliability was very high. The remaining disagreements were then discussed, resolved and added to the total frequencies (the researchers would also like to thank Izutsu, the author of the 2008 article, for her professional advice on identifying the functions of some of the students' opposition expressions). The frequencies of the markers were later compared between high-, medium-, and low-rated essays.

4. Results

4.1. Quantitative results

First, we investigated quantitative differences in the frequency of opposition expressions in forty-four essays. For this, we obtained the total frequency of the opposition markers used by each student in both their first and second term writing and then compared it to their average score. Figure 1 below presents the results of this relationship.

HERE: Fig. 1. The relationship between opposition expressions and writing score

As the scattergram in Figure 1 above illustrates, the data points are not well distributed along the regression line and no meaningful patterns exist in terms of the use of the opposition markers by students with different scores, suggesting that there is no relationship between these two variables. The Spearman's rho test, a nonparametric test which is commonly used in corpus studies that makes no assumption of normality (Lee & Deakin, 2016; McEnery & Wilson, 2001), also confirmed this result. The correlation between the frequency of opposition expressions and writing score was not significant ($r = .111$, $N = 44$, $p > .472$, two-tailed).

4.2. Qualitative results

We also investigated qualitative differences in the use of the expressions in good, average and poor essays. That is to say, we, first, looked at the use of markers to signal opposition relations and the types of functions that students employed to signal these relations and, then, compared their use between high-, middle-, and low-scoring writers. From this qualitative analysis, we predicted that high-scoring student writers would use more concessive and contrastive markers than middle- or low-scoring student writers. The percentage of the frequency patterns of high-, middle- and low-scored assignments is presented in Figure 2 below. In this figure and later in the paper, we present the results of the use of concessive and contrast markers only, for there was only one marker *but* that was used to signal correction relations (1.72% by high-scorers, 3.28% by middle-scorers, and 3.17% by low-scorers).

HERE: Fig. 2. Opposition expressions by high-, middle-, low-scoring writers

As the figure above indicates, there is a considerable difference in the use of the markers by high-, middle, and low-scored writers. The following explains these results in detail.

The relationship between the use of concessive and writing score

With regard to the use of discourse markers to express concessive relations, high-scorers used more than half of concessives (17.60% out of all markers) than middle- (8.52%) and low-scoring writers (7.69%). High- and middle-scoring writers also made more attempts to express concessive relations more frequently than the low-scoring writers. The detailed results of the individual opposition markers are presented in Appendix B.

When looking at the types of concessive markers that students employed, the most frequent markers were *although*, *but*, and *however*. With regard to the marker *although*, while all the scorers attempted to employ it to express a concessive relation, high-scorers used them appropriately twice as many (42.86%) than middle- or low-scorers (20% and 26.09% respectively). The low-scorers used *although* most inappropriately (39.13%). Below are some examples of appropriate and inappropriate use of concessive marker *although* in high-, middle- and low-scored writing:

(1) It seems that, **although** Hong Kong English does not cause much intelligible problems, it is still not perceived as a desirable model for many learners. (appropriate use, term 1, high-scorer)

(2) **Although** audio feedback is overall evaluated positively, Lunt and Curran also mention the danger of replacing face-to-face interaction with audio feedback. (attempted use, term 1, middle-scorer)

(3) **Although** plenty of studies suggest that linguistic errors could be detrimental to the quality of L2 writings, thus interfering teachers' evaluations. (inappropriate use, term 1, middle-scorer)

(4) **Although** some of studies have found that there is no significant positive indication of language accuracy on posttest scores even if learners repair themselves immediately after recasts. (inappropriate use, term 1, low-scorer)

In the first example, the marker *although* clearly functions as a concession because it can be assumed from the sentence that if Hong Kong English does not cause much intelligible problems, it should be perceived as a desirable model for many learners. This assumption is, however, rejected in the second clause. It is also clear that in both clauses, the reference is made to the same entity of Hong Kong English. In the second example, the use of the concession was coded as attempted because the mutual exclusiveness of the assumption invoked in the first clause (*If audio feedback is evaluated positively, (then normally) its use is advantageous)* and the propositional content of the second clause (*the use of audio feedback is not entirely advantageous; it can pose danger to face-to-face interaction*) is only implied but not explicitly stated. The sentence could be rewritten in a more explicit

way, as in the following, for example: 'Although audio feedback is overall evaluated positively, it poses danger to face-to-face interaction, as mentioned by Lunt and Curran'. In the third and fourth examples, only subordinate clauses 'Although…' are presented, which cannot stand on their own. Moreover, opposition constructions require at least two compared items, but only one item is presented in each sentence. The sentences are, therefore, inappropriate.

Another frequent marker that students used to express a concessive relation was *but*. First, it was interesting to check the total frequency of this marker regardless of its function. Our analysis showed that *but* was used much more frequently by middle- and low-scored writers (69 and 64 occurrences in total) than high-scored writers (40 occurrences). The use of the marker *but* for concessive purposes also differed by score. While the number of appropriate uses of *but* was similar among all three groups (high-scorers used *but* 7.5%, middle-scorers 7.25%, and low-scorers 6.26%), more attempts to use *but* to signal a concessive were made by high- and middle-sored writers (22.5 and 15.94%) than low-scored writers (6.25%). The examples below illustrate appropriate and attempted uses of *but* to express a concession:

(1) In addition, L2 students sometimes have good ideas, **but** have difficulties in organising the ideas. (appropriate use, term 1, middle-scorer)

(2) Moreover, Bartram and Walton (1991:20) present that "errors" are due to the learner trying out something completely new to them and getting it wrong, rather than "mistakes", which refer to something the learner have learned **but** lacking of practice. (appropriate use, term 1, low-scorer)

(3) The research done by Brown & Holloway (2008) is a longitudinal research, **but** they have no statistic tests. (attempted concessive, term 1, middle-scorer)

(4) He also argues, although students prefer error correction, **but** this does not mean that they are unable to judge whether or not it is actually beneficial to them. (E1) (inappropriate use, term 1, middle-scorer)

In the first example, *but* functions as a concession because it can be assumed from the sentence that a person who has good ideas would not be likely to have difficulties in organising their ideas. In the second example, one plausible assumption underlying the use of *but* is that if a learner has learned something, they would at least to some extent have some chance of practice. The use of *but* in the third example was categorised as *attempted* because it is not entirely clear whether the compared items, *the research done by Brown & Holloway* in the first clause and *they* in the second clause, refer to the same entity of *Brown and Holloway's research*. Replacing *they* with *it* would make the sentence appropriate. In the fourth example, *students* in the assumption and *they* in the main clause refer to the same entity of *students*. An assumption that seems to be evoked in this sentence is *If*

students prefer error correction, (then normally) they see it beneficial. However, this assumption (*students seeing corrective feedback beneficial*) and the propositional content of the second clause (*students being able to judge corrective feedback as beneficial*) are not mutually exclusive in the shared domain of *value of feedback*. The use of the marker *but* is also redundant here; therefore, this sentence was coded as inaccurate.

The third most frequently used marker to signal a concession was *however*. In total, regardless of its function, it was the middle-scoring writers who used it most frequently (95 occurrences). High- and low-scoring writers used this marker in similar proportions (58 and 52 occurrences respectively). However, when the marker *however* was used as a concessive, it was the high-scored writers who utilised it for this purpose the most (17.24% vs 11.58% by middle-scorers and 3.85% by low-scorers). High- and middle-scorers also made more attempts to use *however* as a concessive (32.76% and 34.74% respectively) than low-scored students (25% out of all uses of *however*). Below are some examples of these uses:

(1) For example, a pair of sentences, which examined the phonemic contrast [i:]-[i], were "Look out for that sheep" and "Look out for that ship". **However**, pairs of sentences like that were not put together, expecting that the participants might notice that it was a test for phonemic contrast vowels and thereby changing their natural way of producing those vowels. (appropriate use, term 1, high-scorer)

(2) Almost all the structure talked about is teacher-leading initiation. **However**, there are times when students ask questions or provide information to the teacher. (appropriate use, term 1, middle-scorer)

(3) Little time could be spent on revision with a busy learning schedule. **However**, students' revisions are essential to the effectiveness of CF and it is also directly connected to the improvement of their writings. (attempted use, term 1, middle-scorer)

(4) For L2 students, they are willing to receiving teachers' feedback, especially feedback on grammar because they believe it is of great significance to their writing development. **However**, teachers' written feedback generally focuses on the form of the writing such as grammar and lexis, content and genre is less emphasized (K. Hyland, 2007). (inappropriate, term 1, middle-scorer)

In the first example, the use of *however* expresses a concessive meaning. The first part suggests that the two examples ("Look out for that sheep" and "Look out for that ship") are presented together in an experiment or questionnaire, which is in conflict with what is described in the second sentence. In the second example, the sentence is interpreted as concessive because of the word 'all' in the first clause, for, according to König (1991), such universal quantities are more likely to invoke a concessive interpretation. A relevant assumption would be something like this: *If almost all classroom discussion is initiated by the teacher, one may not expect situations*

where students initiate. In the third example, the mutual exclusiveness of the assumption invoked in the second sentence (*If students' revisions are essential, (then normally) sufficient time should be spent on revisions*) and the propositional content of the first sentence (*little time could be spent on revisions*) is not entirely explicit. It would be more appropriate if the sentences are either reversed or rewritten using the marker *although*, as in the following: 'Although students' revisions are essential, little time is spent on undertaking them'. In the last example, the assumption invoked in the first sentence (*If students prefer feedback on grammar, (then normally) teachers should provide such feedback*) and the propositional content of the second sentence (*teachers focus on the form of the writing such as grammar and lexis*) are not mutually exclusive; hence inappropriate use.

4.3. The relationship between the use of contrast and writing score

With regard to contrast relations, similar patterns emerge. The high-scoring writers used the markers to express contrast more frequently (31.33% out of all markers) than middle- (18.03%) and low-scoring writers (24.43%). It is also interesting to note that while the middle-scoring writers used the appropriate contrast expressions the least (18.03%), they attempted to express such relations the most (9.84% versus 6.44% for high-scorers and 6.79% for low-scorers). These writers seemed to have experimented with the use of the markers for contrast purposes more frequently than high- and low-scoring students.

In terms of specific types of markers that the students used to signal contrast relations, the most frequent markers were *but*, *however*, *while*, and *whereas*. The leading markers to express contrast relations, *while* and *whereas*, were used similarly by all the students. For example, the marker *while* was used by high-scorers 66.67%, by middle-scorers 63.04%, and by low-scorers 62.07%; and the marker *whereas* was utilised by high-scorers 100% out of all uses of *whereas*, by middle-scorers 72.73%, by low-scorers 80%.

Students' use of *however* and *but* to signal contrast meanings was different depending on their score. While all the students preferred the marker *however*, differences emerged when comparing *however* with the use of *but*. High-scoring writers used the marker *however* slightly more frequently (24.14%) than the marker *but* (22.5%), while the middle- or low-scoring writers used *but* much more frequently (14.49% and 17.19% respectively) than the marker *however* (6.23% and 9.62% respectively). Furthermore, all the students made more attempts to use the marker *however* (high-scorers attempted 13.79%, middle-scorers 15.79%, and low-scorers 13.46%) than the marker *but* (2.5%, 4.35% and 4.69% respectively). These uses are illustrated in the examples below:

(1) In producing the [i:]-[i] contrast, Participant II did not make any errors. **However**, Participant I produced [i:] (e.g. in *cheeks*) incorrectly once as if it were [i] (e.g. in *chicks*) in the total of five productions, and

produced [i] (e.g. in *ship*) incorrectly three times out of five productions as if it were [i:] (e.g. in *sheep*). (appropriate use, term 1, high-scorer)

(2) When the sentence "put the cup on the table" is transferred to Korean, Korean people are likely to think about whether it is loose support or tight support, **but** English people perceive "on" as a whole concept of support. (appropriate use, term 1, low-scorer)

(3) He continues to state that close questions are often asked to check students' understanding or to consolidate what students already know. **However**, when students' opinions and ideas are asked, open-ended questions should be adopted to promote longer and more complex responses. (attempted use, term 1, middle-scorer)

(4) She is a Chinese student whose major is English in her undergraduate year, **but** she is in the first year of her master degree in America these days (attempted use, term 1, high-scorer)

(5) The impact of first culture on writing is considerable, resulted from social values and language conventions. **However**, second culture can influence L2 writing through a period of learning. (inappropriate, term 2, low-scorer)

(6) Buck (1988) defined washback as 'natural tendency for both teachers and students tailoring their classroom activities to the demands of the test' (p.17), **but** Alderson and Wall (1993) claimed that individual characteristics of teachers are more contributive to washback. (inappropriate, term 2, middle-scorer)

The first two examples were coded as appropriate uses of contrast because they contained two different items that were explicitly compared: *Participant II* and *Participant I* in the first example and *Korean people* and *English people* in the second example. The shared domains of the compared items are also clear, *the amount of errors* in the first example and *perception of proposition 'on'* in the second example. The sentence in the third example is coded as attempted because the values of the compared items are not explicit. While the value of the compared item *closed questions* in the first sentence is *to check students' understanding or to consolidate what students already know*, the value of the item *open-ended questions* in the second sentence is unclear. It could be either *when students' opinions and ideas are asked* or *to promote longer and more complex responses*. This also confuses the shared domain of the compared values. The fourth example is also coded as attempted. The compared items seem to be between *undergraduate* and *postgraduate studies*, although it is not entirely clear whether these studies are compared in terms of their major or something else. In the fifth example, the contrasted items are *first culture* and *second culture*; however, they are not compared in terms of the same shared domain. In the first clause, the

emphasis seems to be on the extent and reasons of influence, but in the second clause, it is about the duration of influence. Thus, without a shared domain, the construction becomes incoherent and coded as inappropriate. In the final example, statements by different researchers seemed to be contrasted; however, these statements do not share the same domain. In the first clause, the statement is either about a definition of washback or the purpose of washback, but in the second clause, it is about factors contributing to washback.

Finally, it was the low-scoring papers that contained the most frequent instances of inappropriate use of *however* out of all its uses (48.08%), and that the high-scoring papers had the least instances of inappropriate use of this marker (12.07%). Importantly, the middle-scored papers contained almost as many inappropriate uses of *however* as low-scored papers (31.58%).

5. Discussion

It has been argued in the introduction and literature review that successful writing can greatly depend on the writer's observation of the context. In the context of an academic discipline, including the discipline of TESOL, a contrastive and evaluative approach to constructing arguments is highly valued and which could be realised through the use of appropriate opposition expressions. Given the limited research on students' use of these expressions, the key aim of this study was to obtain a better understanding of the construction of contrast, concessive and corrective forms and their functions in good, average, and poor essays written by postgraduate ESL Chinese students. As in the previous studies, the findings obtained from the quantitative analysis did not reveal significant differences in the use of the expressions by score (Alarcon & Morales, 2011; Basturkemen & von Randow, 2014; McNamara, Crossley, & McCarthy, 2010). However, our rigorous qualitative analysis yielded some valuable results. High-scoring essays signalled concessive and contrast relations proportionally more than did average or low-scored essays. This finding corresponds to the findings of Aull and Lancaster's (2014) study that showed a greater use of opposition markers by more advanced student writers. The finding is somewhat in contrast to Basturkmen and von Randow's (2014) study on the use of concessives in postgraduate doctoral student writing. Their study found a small difference in the frequency of concessive relations between higher- and lower-scoring essays, although it was still higher-scorers who used these concessive markers the most. However, given a higher educational level of students in Basturkmen and von Randow's (2014) study, it is likely that the students possessed more awareness of opposition expressions and used them similarly in their writing. On the other hand, as in Basturkmen and von Randow's (2014) study, high-scorers in our study also utilised a wider variety of opposition expressions than middle- or low-scorers. In addition, perhaps unsurprisingly, the most frequent instances of an inappropriate use of opposition expressions was found in low-scoring papers. The high-scoring

papers had the least instances of inappropriate use of the expressions. Furthermore, in this study, attempted constructions of opposition meanings were also identified. As the results revealed, it was the high- and middle-scoring students who made more attempts to use concessive markers than the low-scoring students. Middle-scoring students also made more attempts to signal contrast relations. In other words, the results showed that there was a gap between the students' declarative and procedural knowledge; that is, the students' knowledge about opposition markers and their ability to use those markers (Johnson, 1996), but this gap was much smaller than for the low-scoring students. This information could be particularly useful for teaching purposes. The students who construct opposition relations more or less successfully would need different instruction from the students who mostly construct them inappropriately. While the former would require more hours of practice and appropriate feedback before they could successfully build complex opposition relations, the latter, in addition to practice opportunities, would also need more provision to declarative rules and explanations, massive exposure to model exemplars and increased salience of those examples. Practice activities could then provide students with opportunities to test their hypotheses about opposition constructions and to notice the gap between what they want to say and what they can say (Gass, 1997; Swain, 1995). Exposure to numerous exemplars could help students to build up a statistical representation of the most common forms of opposition constructions and later to use them in their writing (Ellis, 2004; 2006a; 2006b). To speed up this learning process, explicit attention to the forms and functions of opposition constructions would also be necessary (see Conclusion and implications section).

The analysis of individual expressions yielded further interesting results. For example, the most frequent markers that all the students employed to express concessive relations were *although*, *but* and *however*. Such occurrence is similar to the occurrence of the same markers in Aull and Lancaster's (2014) study. Student writers used these markers much more frequently than the markers of *nevertheless* or *nonetheless* (Aull & Lancaster, 2014, p. 170). One of the reasons for the frequent use of these markers could be their frequent occurrence in the English language. As the British National Corpus, for example, shows, the words *although*, *but* and *however* fall within the list of 1,000 most frequent word families. It is perhaps unsurprising, thus, that due to repetitive exposure to these forms, students tended to recycle them in their writing. On the other hand, the words *nevertheless* and *nonetheless* do not appear in any of the lists of the most frequent words in the Corpus. Instead, these words appear in the academic word list in the tenth sublist (out of total ten sublists) of the most frequently used words in English language academic texts and are, therefore, regarded as far less frequent than the markers *although*, *but* and *however* (Coxhead, 2000). The markers *nevertheless* and *nonetheless* are also regarded as more formal and emphatic than *however* and, as Aull and Lancaster (2014) noted, 'may call for a greater orientation to refining the

scope of one's meaning by contrasting a dialogic stance by conceding and countering complexities' (pp. 171-172). In their study, it was more advanced students who used these markers in their writing. Similarly, McNamara et al's (2010) study showed that words that occurred less frequently in the language were only used by high proficiency writers (McNamara et al, 2010). It is perhaps natural, then, that these markers occurred rarely even in high-scored writers of the present study. The students seemed to have been cautious in using these complex markers in their high-stakes assignments.

Further differences emerged when comparing the markers *although, but* and *however* by score. The concessive markers *however* and *although* were used more frequently by high-scorers, and the marker *but* featured more often in writing of middle- and low-scorers regardless of the function of the marker. For contrast purposes, though, high-scorers were confident in using both markers *but* and *however*. A more varied pattern of the use of *but* in this study is slightly different from the pattern in the studies by Alarcon and Morales (2011) and Aull and Lancaster (2014), which showed the frequent use of the marker *but* by all the students. However, students in their studies were undergraduates, so a decrease in the use of *but* by high proficiency postgraduate writers in this study seems plausible, underscoring a factor of an educational level in the development of opposition markers. Furthermore, the frequent use of *but* by middle- and low-scorers could perhaps be explained by the impact of familiarity. As shown by Park (1998, p. 278), in English in general, *but* is the most frequently used form, compared to other forms, such as *although* and *however*. Frequent linguistic items, as pointed out by Leedham and Cai (2013, p. 380), are familiar to students and they feel 'safe' in using them in their writing. It is, therefore, likely that *but* as a frequent linguistic marker was also more familiar to the students and they felt confident in using it in their writing. On the other hand, a more frequent use of the markers *although* and *however* by high- and middle-scorers could be due to these students' conformity to academic standards. In academic English, it is the markers *although* and *however* rather than *but* that are more preferred options (Biber et al, 1999). It is also likely that these students were engaged with the subject knowledge more intensively than low-scoring students, and instead of presenting arguments as merely facts, they attempted to consider counterarguments and to mitigate claims. It is also interesting to note here that to signal contrast, more attempts were made to use *however* rather than *but* by all the students, suggesting students' rather 'lazy' reliance on the marker *however*. Student writers' overuse of *however* is similarly reported in other studies (Aull & Lancaster, 2014; Bolton et al., 2002; Shaw, 2009). They use the marker *however* much more frequently than other markers and twice as frequently as expert writers. Again, students' familiarity with the marker *however* could be a likely reason for the predominant use of this marker in their writing.

To sum up, the differences in the frequency of opposition expressions in student writing could well be due to different levels of the writers' awareness of the audience. The writers of higher-rated essays could have considered their audience more often and, therefore, made more attempts to establish the mutual understanding with them. As Hyland (2004) explains, 'the explicit signalling of connections between elements in an argument … is always related to the writer's awareness of self, the reader, and the reader's likely response' (p. 138). Furthermore, students' subject knowledge could have also played a role in their use of opposition expressions. The greater use of opposition markers in high-scored writing could well be explained by the fact that these writers made more attempts to evaluate the knowledge of the subject and were, therefore, 'doing more work to distinguish between multiple positions' (Aull & Lancaster, 2014, p. 168). Students' use of opposition expressions could be also related to their knowledge of specific linguistic markers. Low-scoring writers could have had a smaller repertoire of the resources and, therefore, have utilised them more infrequently than others. Further studies focusing on both the use of opposition relations as well as students and their tutors' views on the uses would be, therefore, needed to shed more light on these reasons.

This study is an early contribution to the role of opposition relations in academic L2 writing. While further studies, combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches to analyse student writing, are needed to understand this role, this study, nevertheless, provides some evidence that opposition expressions can play an important role in student writing. As the qualitative analysis of students' essays demonstrated, the differences in the use of opposition expressions by high-, middle- and low-scoring writers were considerable and cannot be ignored. Thus, although the patterns of differences in the construction of opposition relations in the high-, middle- and low-scored essays may not fully account for the score differences, they may, nevertheless, highlight students' ability to contrast and evaluate various viewpoints that is highly valued by their course tutors.

6. Conclusion and implications

As students progress into advanced levels of writing in their target disciplines and are expected to engage with their audience, they need to develop and confidently utilise a wide range of rhetorical strategies to make their communication successful. The marker *however* emerged as the most frequently used and attempted marker to signal both concessive and contrast relations in student writing. While the marker perfectly fits the style of academic prose, the use of a wide range of opposition expressions, such as, for example, *nevertheless* and *nonetheless*, would be needed to claim expertise in writing. As Leedham and Cai (2013) showed, the ability to construct opposition relations in more varied ways was a sign of a more advanced writer (Leedham & Cai, 2013).

Thus, the learning of how to use *however* appropriately and a wide range of other markers to signal opposition relations would be highly recommended.

A number of teaching approaches could be employed to help the EAP community enhance the competence of understanding and use of opposition relations. One important approach that we would like to recommend is a read-analyse and write approach developed by Robinson et al (2008) for their project entitled 'Write Like a Chemist'. In this approach, students would be required to read authentic texts from target disciplinary genres and to analyse opposition relations to discover what types of opposition relations are common and how they are used in different genres. However, exposing students to expert writing may not be sufficient, for, as Petrić (2007) rightly pointed out, 'scholars and students write for different audiences, have different writing goals, and use different genres … [and therefore] what is considered effective [language] use in student and scholarly writing may not be the same'. Teachers, therefore, would also be advised to invite students to examine writing of successful student writers. The use of the British Academic Written English Corpus (BAWE) (Nesi & Gardner, 2012) would be highly recommended here. It is the first open access corpus containing assignments written by native and non-native students from first year undergraduate to postgraduate master's level, across 35 disciplines and from four UK universities. All writing in BAWE is advanced student writing, defined as graded assignments receiving the award of upper second ('merit') or first ('distinction') class honours degree (in the U.S. university system, the distinction grade is comparable to an 'A' grade, while the merit grade is comparable to a 'B' grade). Using the BAWE Corpus, teachers could then invite students to analyse opposition markers in specific disciplines and specific educational levels. They could also ask students to compare and contrast how L2 students of the same first language, for example, Mandarin Chinese, use opposition markers compared to L1 students and to discover specific frequency patterns, such as the most underused or overused expressions of opposition markers. In addition, small corpora such as this research corpus can be compiled by subject and EAP teachers and drawn upon for exemplars. This type of corpus could present exemplars in specific disciplines and illustrate responses to similar prompts that students typically face in their programmes (Ghadessy, Henry, & Roseberry, 2001).

Explicitly instructing students how to use corpora would be essential. Teachers could first explain and demonstrate how to use the main corpus linguistic procedures and then invite students to examine both frequency and function of opposition expressions in different corpora. One typically recommended activity of using corpora in the teaching would be to prepare concordance lines, as in the example below.

a more abstract, more complex process.	**However**	, a developmental explanation of why these
nonchance agreement. Unlike an r value,	**however**	, a kappa does not stand on its own as a

to be coherent. Unlike this student, **however** , a number of other students found it difficult

especially of student academic writing. **However** , a plan to synthesize, as it is defined here,

students' writing would improve. There is, **however** , a problem with that inference. In this study

one tends to . . . or give good advice. **However** , accomplishing these is a problem, so I guess

By asking students to analyse a set of concordance lines for the target word *however*, teachers could then help students to learn about the frequent position of the marker in the text, that is, whether it typically occurs at the beginning, the middle or the end of the sentence. Teachers could then invite students to analyse the same marker in different genres and discuss the results in terms of the purpose, audience and author of the text. In other words, raising students' awareness of the use of the marker in relation to specific contexts and socio-cultural norms would be critical. In addition, it would be particularly important to draw students' attention to different functions that the same marker performs in a text; for example, whether *however* is used for concessive or contrast purposes. The conceptual framework employed in this study could serve as an important resource for the teaching of the functions. Introducing students to different types of opposition relations and the key criteria for distinguishing them would heighten students' awareness of these relations and improve their ability to construct them appropriately.

Later, as students begin to construct opposition relations in their own texts, teachers would be strongly advised to support them with the necessary feedback and prompts. Teacher as well as peer feedback would be critical. Students' interactive dialogues with peers and the teacher could help students to notice their problematic areas and then to find appropriate ways to deal with those areas. Finally, we endorse the teaching based on students' needs and research (Archer & Hughes, 2011). Teachers should carry out students' needs assessment and corpus analyses to identify students' inappropriate constructions of opposition relations and then to prepare specific teaching materials to work on those constructions. In short, we recommend the approach which teaches opposition expressions in accordance with specific disciplinary practices that influence the choice of these expressions and which is based on students' needs and corpus analysis.

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Appendix A. Classification scheme of opposition relations (adapted from Izutsu, 2008)

Category and markers	**Code**	**Definition and example from Izutsu (2008)**	**Examples from students' data**
Concessive *(al)though,* *but,* *despite/ in spite of,* *even though,* *even if,* *even so* *(however),* *however,* *nevertheless,* *nonetheless,* *notwithstanding that,* *yet,* *while*	**C**	It designates a mutually exclusive relation between an assumption evoked from one clause and a propositional content of another clause or between two assumptions, where the compared items are two different tokens (occurrences) of the identical entity with one in an assumption and the other in a propositional content. The mutually exclusive relation is in the same shared domain. E.g., In ***Although*** *John is poor, he is happy*, the compared items *John* in the assumption and *he* in the propositional content refer to the same entity *John*. An assumption that is evoked is *If John is poor, (then normally) he is not happy*. This assumption (*he is not happy*) and the propositional content of the second clause (*he is happy*) are mutually exclusive in the shared domain of *happiness*.	'**Although** Chen et al. (2014) did not investigate the possible impact on the learners; they do provide an effective framework for us to think whether this lack of knowledge truly has negative influence on the acquisition of English speaking.' **Explanation**: Here, *Chen et al* in the assumption and *they* in the second clause are different occurrences but refer to the same entity of *Chen et al*. An assumption that is invoked in the subordinate clause is *If Chen et al did not investigate the possible impact on the learners, (then normally) they do not provide an effective framework*. This assumption (*they do not provide an effective framework*) and the propositional content of the second clause (*they do provide an effective framework*) are mutually exclusive in the shared domain of *framework effectiveness*).
Concessive Attempted	**CA**	Where the reference of two different compared items to the same entity, or values of the items, or the shared domain of the values, or the mutual exclusiveness of the values are implied but not explicit, the proposition is coded as attempted concessive. E.g., In ***Although*** *John is poor, John is happy*, the redundant use of *John* in the second clause makes it unclear whether the compared items refer to the same *John* or two different *Johns*. The appropriate construction would be *Although John is poor, he is happy*.	'**Although** a certain accented speech appears to be intelligible, listeners might experience difficulty with understanding **speech** that is different from the patterns with which they are familiar with.' **Explanation**: Here, the compared items, *a certain accented speech* in the assumption and *speech* in the main clause do not explicitly refer to the same entity *accented speech*. The writer could refer to speech in general. With the explicitly stated entity, it could be inferred from the subordinate clause that the evoked assumption is *If a certain accented speech is intelligible, (then normally) it is understood*. This assumption (*it is understood)* and the propositional content of the second clause *(it is not entirely understood by all)* are mutually exclusive in the shared domain of *intelligibility* of *accented speech*. **Suggested construction:** 'Although a certain accented speech appears to be intelligible, it might still be difficult to understand for those listeners whose accented speech is different from the speech with which they are familiar.'

Contrast *but,* *by comparison,* *conversely,* *in/by contrast,* *however,* *on the other hand,* *whereas,* *while,* *unlike*	**CT**	It designates a mutually exclusive relation between two or more propositional contents of clauses, where the compared items are explicitly differentiated and comparable in terms of the same shared domain. E.g., in *John is rich,* ***but*** *Tom is poor*, the compared items *John* and *Tom*, are two explicitly different items with mutually exclusive values of *rich* and *poor* in the shared domain of *richness*.	'However, 'spinster' contains a sense of discrimination, it connotes a woman who is too old to get married, **but** 'bachelor' does not have this connotation (Carroll, 2008).' **Explanation**: Here, two explicitly different items, *spinster* and *bachelor*, are compared in terms of the shared domain of *age discrimination*. The compared values of *too old* and *not too old* are mutually exclusive.
Contrast Attempted	**CTA**	Where two or more different compared items, or values of the items, or the shared domain of the values, or the mutual exclusiveness of the values are implied but not explicitly differentiated, the proposition is coded as attempted contrast. E.g., in *John is small,* ***but*** *he is big*, the compared item *he* is ambiguous. It is not clear whether *he* refers to *John* (in this case, the sentence would be unacceptable because the same items are compared) or to an entity other than *John* (the sentence would be acceptable because different items are compared).	'The results showed that early-arriving learners' production of the target vowels tend to be rated as unaccented, **but** only a minority of the vowels produced by latest-arriving learners were rated as unaccented.' **Explanation:** Here, the mixing of active and passive voice in the two clauses makes it difficult to understand the compared items and the mutual exclusiveness of their values. With the correct word order, it could be inferred that two different items are *vowels by early-arriving learners* in the first clause and *vowels by late-arriving learners* in the second clause, with mutually exclusive values of *unaccented* and *accented* in the same shared domain of *accent rating*. **Suggested construction**: 'The results showed that the vowels produced by early-arriving learners were mostly rated as unaccented, but the vowels produced by latest-arriving learners were mostly rated as accented.'
Correction *not … but,* *instead, rather*	**CR**	It designates a mutually exclusive relation between a rejected (and thus invalid) semantic content and an asserted semantic content, where the compared items are two different tokens (occurrences) of the identical entity and comparable in terms of the same shared domain. The correction also requires the presence of a morphologically independent negative which expresses denial, i.e., rejection of previously made statement, and the deletion of repeated items in the second conjunct. E.g., in *John is* ***not*** *American* ***but*** *British*, the corrective sentence makes a denial of a previous assertion using an independent negative *not* and deleting a subject *John* and a copular verb *be* in the second conjunct. The value *American* and the value *British* are mutually exclusive in the shared domain of *nationality*. The compared items *John* in the first conjunct and *John* invoked in the second conjunct, are different tokens of the same entity *John*.	'However, to develop economy is **not** the reason to do so, **but** an excuse.' **Explanation**: Here, the word *however* makes a reference to the information in the prior discourse and suggests that the writer rejects the previously stated assertion as invalid. In this case, the writer seems to suggest that one is doing 'so' not because they want to develop economy but perhaps they want to do something else, and the economy is only an excuse. In the second conjunct, the subject *to develop economy* and the copular verb *is* are deleted. In addition, the value *the reason to do so* and the value *an excuse [to do so]* are mutually exclusive in the shared domain of *explanation of action*. The compared items, *to develop economy* in the first conjunct and *to develop economy* invoked in the second conjunct refer to the same entity *to develop economy*.

Correction Attempted	**CRA**	Where the reference of two different compared items to the same entity, or values of the items, or the shared domain of the values, or the mutual exclusiveness of the values are implied but not explicit, or where a morphologically independent negative expressing denial is absent, or there is repetition of the same items in the second clause, the proposition is coded as attempted correction. E.g., in *It is unlikely **but** certain*, the explicit negative *not* is absent. The appropriate construction would be *It is not likely but certain*.	'These relations suggest, words in mental lexicon are **not** isolated, **but** words are connected each other.' **Explanation:** The compared items, *words in mental lexicon* in the first adjunct and *words* in the second adjunct refer to the same entity *words in mental lexicon*. The value *isolation of words* and the value *connection of words* are also mutually exclusive in the shared domain of *position of words*. In addition, the reference to the information in the prior discourse (*These relations suggest*) suggests that the writer attempts to make a denial of a previous assertion. However, to make such a construction appropriate, the corrective sentence requires that the conjunct delete a subject *words* and a copular verb *are*. **Suggested construction:** 'These relations suggest that words in mental lexicon are not isolated, but connected to each other.'
Elaboration *not only ... but also*	**E**	It heightens clarity, reduces ambiguity, elaborates by listing several qualities. *E.g.,* In *The car **not only** is economical **but also** feels good to drive,* the emphasis is on the car that has more than one quality. (from Online Cambridge Dictionary)	'To a certain degree, Grice's framework is **not only** regarded as one classical approach to pragmatic analysis, **but also** as 'the principal principles of pragmatic inference (Turner, 1995, p. 67).' **Explanation**: Here, the writer emphasises Grice's framework as having a number of qualities.
Inappropriate	**I**	Where the compared items or the values of the items refer to different domains, or the values of the compared items are not mutually exclusive, the proposition is coded as inappropriate. E.g., in *John is small, but the earth is big,* the compared items *John* and *earth,* are not, in general, comparable with each other. In *John is rich, but Tom is awake*, while *John* and *Tom* are comparable items, their values, *rich* and *awake*, are not in the same shared domain. Similarly, in *John is not American, but handsome*, the compared items *American* and *handsome*, are in different domains. In *John is not American but American*, the values *American* and *American*, are not mutually exclusive. Thus, without a shared domain or mutually exclusive values, the proposition becomes incoherent and coded as inappropriate.	'The last three moves, the focus of this assignment, are followed by most classroom discourse, as Walsh concludes (2011). The move, **however**, comprise one or more acts, which has twenty-one different classes.' **Explanation:** Here, the compared items, *three moves* and *the move* could be comparable. However, the values of the compared items are not in the same shared domain. In the first clause, the writer starts with the idea of 'three moves' as a characteristic of a classroom discourse, but in the second clause, the writer seems to be defining a move. Without such a shared domain, the proposition is incoherent.

Appendix B. The frequency of opposition expressions used by high-, middle-, and low-scorers

Opposition expression	Function	Total N High-Scorer	Total % High-Scorer	Total N Middle-Scorer	Total % Middle-Scorer	Total N Low-Scorer	Total % Low-Scorer
although	**C**	**15**	**42.86**	**4**	**20**	**6**	**26.09**
	CA	**13**	**37.14**	**10**	**50**	**8**	**34.78**
	I	**7**	**20.00**	**6**	**30**	**9**	**39.13**
TOTAL		**35**	**100.00**	**20**	**100**	**23**	**100.00**
though	**C**	0	**0**	4	**20**	1	**33.33**
	CA	1	**100**	9	**45**	0	**0.00**
	I	0	**0**	7	**35**	2	**66.67**
TOTAL		**1**	**100**	**20**	**100**	**3**	**100.00**
even though	**C**	2	**40**	0	**0**	2	**66.67**
	CA	3	**60**	3	**75**	1	**33.33**
	I	0	**0**	1	**25**	0	**0.00**
			100		**100**		
TOTAL		**5**	**100**	**4**	**100**	**3**	**100.00**
despite	**C**	3	**33.33**	0	**0**	2	**40**
	CA	4	**44.44**	2	**50**	2	**40**
	I	2	**22.22**	2	**50**	1	**20**
TOTAL		**9**	**100.00**	**4**	**100**	**5**	**100**
in spite of	**C**	0	**0**	1	**100**	0	**0**
	CA	0	**0**	0	**0**	1	**50**
	I	0	**0**	0	**0**	1	**50**
TOTAL		**0**	**0**	**1**	**100**	**2**	**100**
but	**C**	3	**7.5**	5	**7.25**	4	**6.25**
	CA	9	**22.5**	11	**15.94**	4	**6.25**
	CT	9	**22.5**	10	**14.49**	11	**17.19**
	CTA	1	**2.5**	3	**4.35**	3	**4.69**
	CR	4	**10**	10	**14.49**	7	**10.94**
	CRA	0	**0**	1	**1.45**	3	**4.69**
	E	10	**25**	16	**23.19**	19	**29.69**
	I	4	**10**	13	**18.84**	13	**20.31**
TOTAL		**40**	**100**	**69**	**100.00**	**64**	**100.00**
however	**C**	10	**17.24**	11	**11.58**	2	**3.85**
	CA	19	**32.76**	33	**34.74**	13	**25**
	CT	14	**24.14**	6	**6.32**	5	**9.62**
	CTA	8	**13.79**	15	**15.79**	7	**13.46**
	I	7	**12.07**	30	**31.58**	25	**48.08**
TOTAL		**58**	**100.00**	**95**	**100.00**	**52**	**100**
nevertheless	**C**	1	**6.67**	0	**0.00**	0	**0.00**
	CA	6	**40.00**	9	**47.37**	1	**7.69**
	CT	0	**0**	0	**0.00**	0	**0.00**
	CTA	5	**33.33**	5	**26.32**	1	**7.69**
	I	3	**20.00**	5	**26.32**	11	**84.62**
TOTAL		**15**	**100.00**	**19**	**100.00**	**13**	**100.00**
nonetheless	**C**	0	**0**	0	**0**	0	**0**
	CA	1	**20**	1	**100**	0	**0**
	CT	3	**60**	0	**0**	0	**0**
	CTA	0	**0**	0	**0**	0	**0**
	I	1	**20**	0	**0**	0	**0**
TOTAL		**5**	**100**	**1**	**100**	**0**	**0**
by contrast	**CT**	0	**0**	0	**0**	1	**100**
	CTA	0	**0**	0	**0**	0	**0**
	I	0	**0**	0	**0**	0	**0**
TOTAL		**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**1**	**100**

in contrast	**CT**	0	**0**	0	**0**	2	**100**
	CTA	0	**0**	0	**0**	0	**0**
	I	0	**0**	0	**0**	0	**0**
TOTAL		**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**2**	**100**
on the contrary	**CT**	1	**50**	1	**33.33**	1	**100**
	CTA	0	**0**	1	**33.33**	0	**0**
	I	1	**50**	1	**33.33**	0	**0**
TOTAL		**2**	**100**	**3**	**100.00**	**1**	**100**
conversely	**CT**	1	**100**	1	**100**	1	**33.33**
	CTA	0	**0**	0	**0**	0	**0.00**
	I	0	**0**	0	**0**	2	**66.67**
TOTAL		**1**	**100**	**1**	**100**	**3**	**100.00**
while	**C**	7	**14.58**	0	**0.00**	0	**0.00**
	CA	5	**10.42**	3	**6.52**	0	**0.00**
	CT	32	**66.67**	29	**63.04**	18	**62.07**
	CTA	1	**2.08**	5	**10.87**	1	**3.45**
	I	3	**6.25**	9	**19.57**	10	**34.48**
TOTAL		**48**	**100.00**	**46**	**100.00**	**29**	**100.00**
whereas	**CT**	13	**100**	8	**72.73**	12	**80.00**
	CTA	0	**0**	1	**9.09**	2	**13.33**
	I	0	**0**	2	**18.18**	1	**6.67**
TOTAL		**13**	**100**	**11**	**100.00**	**15**	**100.00**
yet	**C**	0	**0**	1	**9.09**	0	**0**
	CA	1	**100**	3	**27.27**	0	**0**
	CT	0	**0**	0	**0.00**	3	**60**
	CTA	0	**0**	0	**0.00**	1	**20**
	I	0	**0**	7	**63.64**	1	**20**
TOTAL		**1**	**100**	**11**	**100.00**	**5**	**100**
TOTAL		**233**		**305**		**221**	

TOTAL	**Total N High-Scorer**	**Total % High-Scorer**	**Total N Middle-Scorer**	**Total % Middle-Scorer**	**Total N Low-Scorer**	**Total % Low-Scorer**
Concessive	**41**	**17.60**	**26**	**8.52**	**17**	**7.69**
Concessive Attempted	**62**	**26.61**	**84**	**27.54**	**30**	**13.57**
Contrast	**73**	**31.33**	**55**	**18.03**	**54**	**24.43**
Contrast Attempted	**15**	**6.44**	**30**	**9.84**	**15**	**6.79**
Corrective	**4**	**1.72**	**10**	**3.28**	**7**	**3.17**
Corrective Attempted	**0**	**0.00**	**1**	**0.33**	**3**	**1.36**
Elaboration	**10**	**4.29**	**16**	**5.25**	**19**	**8.60**
Inappropriate	**28**	**12.02**	**83**	**27.21**	**76**	**34.39**
TOTAL	**233**	**100.00**	**305**	**100.00**	**221**	**100.00**

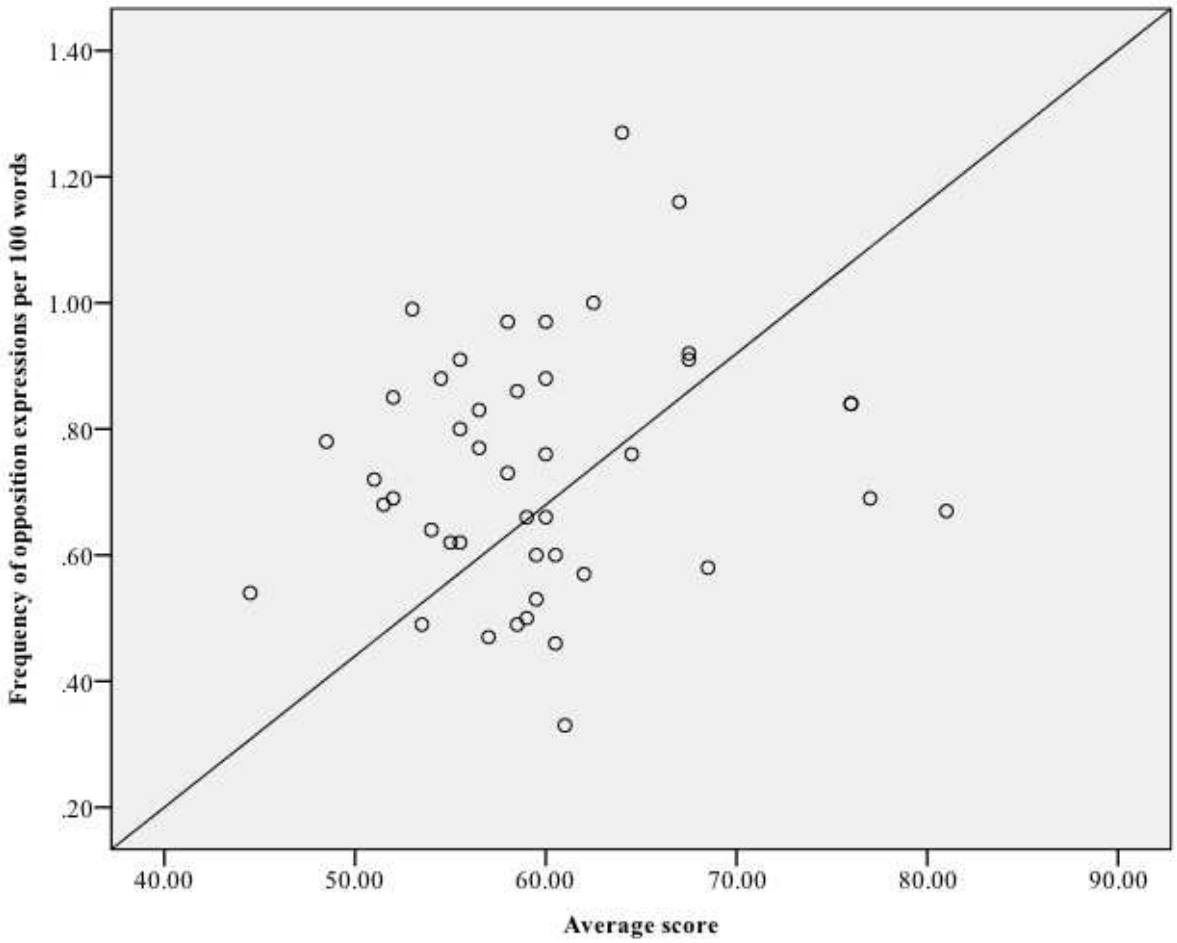
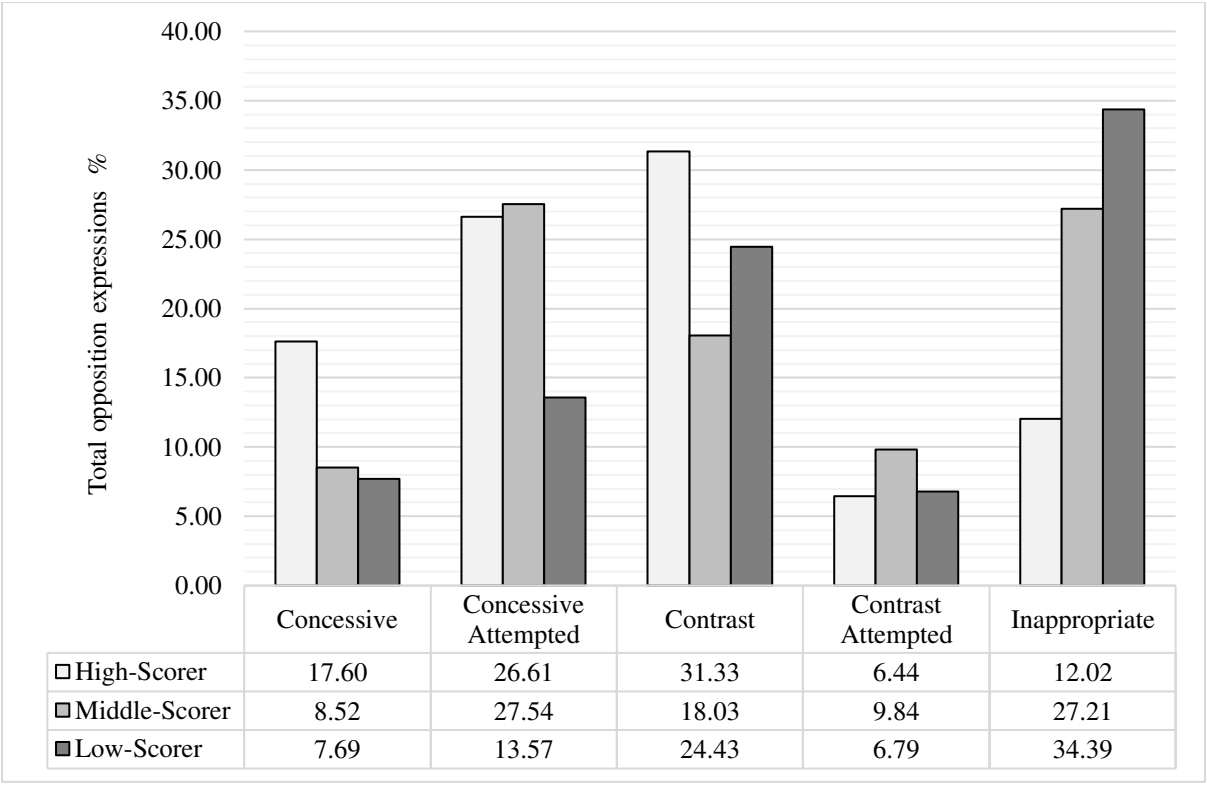


Fig 1. The relationship between opposition expressions and writing score



	Concessive	Concessive Attempted	Contrast	Contrast Attempted	Inappropriate
High-Scorer	17.60	26.61	31.33	6.44	12.02
Middle-Scorer	8.52	27.54	18.03	9.84	27.21
Low-Scorer	7.69	13.57	24.43	6.79	34.39

Fig 2. Opposition expressions by high-, middle-, low-scoring writers